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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 002110

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E, DRL FOR SIMONE JOSEPH, AND INR/B
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TAGS: [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [ET](#)
SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: DIVIDED PARLIAMENT APPROVES NEW NATIONAL
ELECTORAL BOARD

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 00500
[1](#)B. 06 ADDIS ABABA 02123

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Classified By: ERIC WONG, ACTING DCM. REASON: 1.4 (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On June 26, in a divided vote, Parliament approved PM Meles' nominations for a new National Electoral Board (NEB). The selections for the nine-member board came from a pool of candidates proposed to the PM by the inter-party dialogue between the ruling and opposition parties. However, all major opposition groups had earlier withdrawn from the talks, following disagreements on how to screen the initial list of candidates. In the end, seven of the nine new board members were nominated by the ruling coalition, while the remaining two were put forth by quasi-opposition parties. While the independent nature of the new board -- which is made up of seemingly qualified, if unknown candidates -- is still to be proven, a board that had the approval of all parties would have contributed significantly toward political reconciliation. Instead, the new board will be quickly tested, as it must address a number of critical outstanding issues in preparation for local elections scheduled for year end. How the board performs will be fundamental in determining whether these elections are a step forward in Ethiopian democracy and whether the contentious issues following the May 2005 Parliamentary elections can be avoided. END SUMMARY.

DESPITE BREAKDOWN IN TALKS, NEW ELECTION BOARD CHOSEN

[1](#)2. (SBU) In a regular parliamentary session on June 26, Ethiopia's House of People,s Representatives approved a new nine-member NEB. The confirmation of the new board members concludes a six-month negotiation between the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and opposition parties (ref A). The negotiations were intended to address reforms to the electoral law, as well as the mechanism by which new NEB board members would be selected. All parties had been invited to submit candidates for board members, following which the inter-party group would evaluate and screen them for qualifications. Following this, the agreed-upon list of candidates were to be forwarded to Prime Minister Meles for his review and ultimate nomination to Parliament for final approval.

13. (C) Though the talks were originally attended by all major opposition parties, differences on the manner in which candidates should be evaluated, among other significant disagreements, led to the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF), the Oromo Federal Democratic Movement (OFDM), and the Coalition for Unity and Democracy Party (CUDP) leaving the talks with the EPRDF. In the end, only the EPRDF and quasi-opposition parties -) the United Ethiopian Democratic Party - Medhin (UEDP-Medhin) and the CUDP faction led by Ayele Chamisso -) participated in the evaluation of candidates. A list of 42 people were discussed in the limited inter-party group, and subsequently 24 candidates were forwarded to PM Meles for his review. In the end, he selected the following nine members, who were approved by Parliament with 227 votes in favor, 103 against, and 6 abstentions:

-- Chairman: Dr. Merga Bekana. Dr. Merga was born in 1957 in Horo Gudru, East Wellega zone of the Oromiya Region from Oromo parents. He graduated with a PhD from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden. Dr. Merga has been a university lecturer for over 20 years. Currently he is the Dean of Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Addis Ababa University. He speaks English, Amharic and Oromiffa. He is married.

-- Deputy Chairman: Dr. Addisu Gebre-Egziabher. Dr. Addisu was born in 1972 in Adigrat, Tigray from Tigrayan parents. He graduated with a PhD in international law. Dr. Addisu worked as a legal consultant, teacher and researcher. Currently, he serves as Department Head at the Ministry of Federal Affairs. He is married with one child.

-- Mohammed Abdulahi Hussein. Mohammed was born in 1970 in Negele Borena, Oromia region from Somali parents. He has and

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LLM degree has worked as legal expert, lecturer and researcher. He speaks English and Somali. He is married and has two children.

-- Fikremariam Bereded Samuel. Fikremariam was born in Addis Ababa in 1963 from Amhara parents. He graduated with a B.Sc degree. He speaks English and Amharic. He is married with one child.

-- Tegene Getaneh Kifle. Tegene was born in Mettu, Illubabor Zone of Oromiya Region in 1961 from Amhara parents. He graduated with an LLM degree in international human rights law from the University of Essex (U.K.) in 2002. He has worked as a legal expert and judge since graduation. Currently he is the Chief Registrar at the Federal Supreme Court and also works as judge. He was one of the seven members of Gambella violence inquiry commission, in which he served as Secretary. (Note: The Gambella inquiry commission was established to probe the violence which occurred in Gambella Region in December 2003. End Note.) Tegene speaks English and Amharic. He is married and has three children.

-- Mulu Abate Hassen. Mulu was born in Addis Ababa in 1971. She is ethnically Hadiya, from Southern Nations Region of Ethiopia. She has a B.A. in accounting has worked as an auditor and accountant for the last 16 years. She is married and has two children.

-- Zinane Mamo Haile, PhD. Prof. Zinane was born in 1964 in Gidolo in Southern Region of Ethiopia. He is ethnically Derashe, from Southern Nations region of Ethiopia. He has worked as teacher, church leader and served in various non-governmental organizations. He is married

-- Anley Haile Kassa. Anley was born in Debremarkos, Amhara Region in 1958 from Amhara parents. He graduated with a B.A. degree in literature. He has 28 years experience in teaching and at the Ethiopian PressEnterprise in various management

positions. He is married and has four children.

-- Alamirew Kebede Wondafrash, PhD. Alamirew was born in Bale Goba, Oromia Region in 1949, from Gurage parents. He has 35 years of experience in teaching. He speaks Amharic, English and Guragna. He is married with four children.

¶4. (C) Of the nine new board members, seven are EPRDF nominations. Mulu Abate was nominated by the CUDP faction led by Ayele Chamisso, and Zinane Mamo was nominated by UEDP-Medhin.

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ELECTORAL LAW ALSO DIVISIVE, YET STILL PASSES

¶5. (SBU) The selection procedures for the board was the most tangible result of the recently amended electoral law, which Parliament approved on May 30, with 309 votes in support, 86 against and 4 abstentions. In addition to outlining the procedures of the selection of the NEB board members, the new electoral law focuses on capacity-building and expansion of the NEB Secretariat, as proposed by UNDP-funded expert Hannah Roberts (ref B). All aspects of the electoral law were part of the broader inter-party dialogue, but as with the NEB nominations, the UEDF, OFDM and CUDP disengaged in the later stages of the talks upon not receiving desired concessions from the EPRDF on a variety of issues.

COMMENT: LACK OF UNANIMITY DISAPPOINTING

¶6. (C) The electoral law was the most important issue of the six agenda items agreed to by the ruling EPRDF and opposition parties. It addresses one of the issues at the heart of the conflict following the May 2005 elections: the National Electoral Board. It is disappointing that all parties in the talks were not able to ultimately come to an agreement on this issue, as the results are new NEB board members and an overhauled Secretariat. The EPRDF made significant concessions by allowing opposition parties to take part in the nomination of the board, but ultimately a firm stance by both sides resulted in all significant opposition parties

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walking out of the talks. A board that had buy-in from all parties would have done a great deal to alleviate suspicions by opposition voters in the independence of the board. While the new board members may indeed be independent and qualified (as yet unproven), the perception of them as chosen by the EPRDF will be a challenge in upcoming elections.

¶7. (SBU) Though Parliament recesses the week of July 9, the new board will have organize and address critical decisions very quickly. In addition to creating a plan for the implementation of the enhanced Secretariat, the board will also have to begin to address preparations for the upcoming local elections, anticipated for late 2007/early 2008. As the first elections following the contested May 2005 Parliamentary vote, these elections will be a first major test of the new board. Post is actively working with other major donor countries through a pooled fund managed by UNDP to create a plan of assistance and training for the new board and Secretariat. END COMMENT.
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